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Question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)

Letter dated 13 May 2013 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with instructions received from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 15 April 2013 from the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations addressed to you (A/67/839) transmitting, in the annex, a note from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Republic of Argentina, Mr. Héctor Timerman.

It is regrettable that the Republic of Argentina has again made unfounded claims of the United Kingdom's "militarization" of the South Atlantic, despite the many clarifications that my Government has provided and our repeated requests that the Republic of Argentina desist from making such false allegations.

You will recall that the United Kingdom most recently clarified this issue in letters to you dated 22 February 2012 (A/66/706) and 18 October 2012 (A/67/544). Those letters confirmed that the United Kingdom carries out routine biannual exercises involving short-range air defence missiles on the Falkland Islands. There is nothing new in these exercises, which have been carried out every year since the illegal invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982. In 2012, the exercises were carried out in July and October. The first of this year's exercises was held in April 2013. A second exercise will be carried out later this year. Routine military exercises are entirely legitimate and consistent with the inherent rights of all States. We do not agree that we are in breach of any United Nations resolution concerning the Falkland Islands.

These exercises pose no risk to Argentina, the region or maritime traffic. All necessary safety measures, including notification to mariners, were put in place, as usual. The Rapier missiles are short-range surface-to-air missiles. They are purely defensive in nature, designed to provide air defence in the immediate proximity of the Falkland Islands. Given their short range, there is no risk of them falling outside the Falkland Islands' waters.

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My letter dated 22 February 2012 also made clear the United Kingdom's unambiguous position on its nuclear deterrent. I would like to reiterate that position to avoid any doubt. The United Kingdom fully respects the obligations placed on it under the Protocols to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (the Treaty of Tlatelolco). The United Kingdom will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States parties to, and in compliance with, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

My Government has stressed many times that its posture in the South Atlantic is purely defensive in nature. Contrary to Argentine claims of escalation, the United Kingdom's military presence on the Falkland Islands has in fact reduced over time. The military presence peaked at over 20,000 personnel in the aftermath of the Argentine invasion of 1982. In the mid-1990s, the figure stood at around 1,800. Since 2002, it has remained at the current figure of around 1,200.

In the light of this clarification, I hope that Mr. Timerman and his Government will now refrain from making further unfounded and unwarranted claims of "militarization" by the United Kingdom, which itself serves only to raise unnecessary tensions in the region.

My Government has no doubt about the United Kingdom's sovereignty over the Falkland Islands or South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas of these territories. The principle of self-determination, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, underlies the position of the United Kingdom on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islanders have the right to self-determination and the right to develop their economy, including by developing their natural resources for their own economic benefit. The United Kingdom unequivocally supports that right. The Falkland Islanders made their views clear in the recent referendum, when they voted overwhelmingly to retain their constitutional links with the United Kingdom.

My Government hopes that the Republic of Argentina will now respect the Islanders' wishes and allow them to develop their economy and home in peace. The hostile action we have seen previously by the current Government of Argentina, aimed at isolating the Islanders and harming their economy, serves to increase tension in the area, which is unnecessary and unjustified.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 45.

(*Signed*) Mark **Lyall Grant**